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Beyond Billy: The Importance Of Investigating Libya's Treacheries

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WHEN PRESIDENT CARTER convened a 2½-hour meeting of the National Security Council on Jan. 2, 1980, he was hardly concerned that Col. Muammar Qaddafi had convened a five-day meeting of the Libyan General People's Congress in Tripoli on the previous day.

There were pressing crises to be managed because National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski's aptly named Arc of Crisis had taken on new meaning in the last 60 days of the closing decade.

Fifty-three Americans were still hostage in Iran. The Saudi monarchy had been attacked at the Great Mosque in Mecca. The embassy in Islamabad had been sacked, leaving several dead Americans. And the Soviets had ended the decade with an invasion of Afghanistan. With America's position deteriorating around the world, there was no time for an insignificant country like Libya or the "madman" at its head.

And yet, the NSC would have done well to include a fifth item on its agenda, the trashing of the American Embassy in Tripoli the previous month. No one had been hurt and it was hardly unusual by Libyan standards, so it did not warrant high-level attention as a crisis to be managed. Nevertheless, a discussion of it would have brought into better focus the problems which were plaguing the United States: terrorist acts, subversion, militant Islam, and Soviet adventurism.

Let us hope this lesson will not be lost now by the Senate subcommittee that will be investigating Billy Carter's connection with Libya. That investigation must go beyond mere personalities to what Iranian militants, Saudi revolutionaries, Pakistani mobs and Soviet aggressors have long known: Libya has been systematically testing American will and finding that it can act with impunity.

Those Libyan tests have occurred all around the world. Eleven Israeli athletes assassinated at the Munich Olympics. Two American diplomats murdered in Khartoum. Thirty-two people, including 10 American children, massacred aboard a Pan Am flight at Rome Airport. Four killed and 55 wounded on a TWA plane in Athens. Armed

attack on a U.S. reconnaissance plane in international air space. Forced cancellation of U.S. Navy exercises in international waters. The world's most powerful oil ministers kidnapped at an OPEC conference in Vienna. The shooting of four persons, including an American congressional aide, in Istanbul. Countless airplane hijackings. Ghoulis atrocities during years of sectarian fighting in Lebanon. Genocide in the Sahara, Uganda, and Ethiopia. Heavily armed insurgents espousing causes from Northern Ireland to the Southern Moluccas, from the Canary Islands to Nicaragua. Efforts to discredit and overthrow a score of governments from Afghanistan to Zaire.

Nor was Libyan support for terrorism and subversion to end with the decade of the Seventies. While President Carter was meeting with his military and foreign affairs advisers to develop policies aimed at reviving American influence, the General People's Congress was charting a course for the decade of the Eighties which would guarantee a Libyan-American collision.

Domestic matters were disposed of as quickly as possible, for it was "armed struggle" and "liberation movements" which most interested the delegates. The discussion focused on the question of support for Yasser Arafat's Al Fatah.

Suspicious that Arafat and the PLO were succumbing to American and European appeals for moderation, Qaddafi had tested Fatah's commitment to continuation of armed struggle. Arafat had failed that test by refusing to launch guerrilla attacks against the "traitorous Sadat's" Suez Canal and newly regained Sinai oilfields.

Therefore, Qaddafi urged that Libya break relations with Al Fatah and direct its considerable material support to more militant Palestinian organizations. The message would be clear, for Fatah was the largest, oldest and most influential of the various groups under the PLO umbrella.

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